

said her stubborn and uncompromising leadership style had alienated some people.

Still, he said, "our city moved forward, and she was in charge. So whether I liked her or didn't like her, the city moved forward and that was important."

Then there's the county's Achilles heel: high property taxes. Despite an 18 percent reduction in the Unified Government's rate of taxation since 1997, most property tax bills continue to rise as property values surge.

State Sen. David Haley, who lost to Marinovich in a landslide in 1997 and who later sparred with her on many legislative matters, accused the mayor of not doing more to lower taxes. "I just think she had the power to be a catalyst for progress for the taxpayers," he said. "It's not an abuse of power; it's just an underutilization of all that office could have done."

Despite that criticism, Haley insisted that Marinovich "does have a track record that is enviable. And at the end of the day, she accomplished a tremendous amount for Wyandotte County."

Marinovich acknowledges that the Unified Government, which came with the promise of more efficient government, needs to rein in spending. In 1997, county and city spending stood at \$168.8 million. In 2003, the last year available for the government's actual expenses, that figure had jumped 24.6 percent, to \$210 million.

Wage increases, rising health-care costs, the addition of nearly 100 employees—many of them hired to form a new emergency medical service—account for much of that increase. But with a budget that stands at more than \$250 million this year, the government's expenses aren't going down.

Marinovich, who attributes many of the budget issues to the plight of an aging city, said one of the biggest challenges for the next administration would be to get that spending under control. If it can't, she said, "That doesn't bode well for the future."

A LASTING MARK

If Marinovich controlled her legacy, she would place revitalization and consolidation of the city and county governments above economic development. County Administrator Dennis Hays seconds that.

Consolidation ended decades of local Democratic Party machine politics. But, Hays said, it also gave the community a single body to make decisions. "We could not have done what we did with the speedway and Village West without it," Hays said. "Our community needed a single voice to take a risk and move forward."

Consolidation also gave Marinovich immense power. With a veto threat in hand, the ability to break tie votes and the authority to hire and fire the administrator (with the commission's support), the Unified Government's mayor occupies a position of strength that other mayors around Kansas City can only dream of.

It's a government with true executive power, said real estate agent Mike Jacobi,

co-founder of the consolidation movement. And Marinovich has used that power responsibly, he said: "She restored our integrity. Taxes were skyrocketing; values were falling. 'When you restore the integrity of the community,' he said, 'it's OK to invest here again. It's OK to live here again.'"

THE MARINOVICH LEGACY

The most visible evidence of Wyandotte County's economic resurgence under Carol Marinovich is Kansas Speedway and Village West commercial district.

To make way for that massive complex in 1998, Marinovich and the Unified Government Commission displaced 150 families in western Wyandotte County—the most difficult moment of her political career, she has said.

Other hallmarks of her tenure: Consolidation of the city and county governments. Voter approval of consolidation in 1997 quelled the influence of a powerful Democratic Party machine that had overseen decades of economic decline.

As a city councilwoman, she teamed with District Attorney Nick Tomasic to take on the city's adult entertainment industry, eventually wiping it out.

With the Unified Board of Commissioners' support, she stepped up the demolition of blighted structures and cracked down on code violators, angering landlords who viewed the measures as too harsh.

LEFT UNDONE

The unfinished business that Marinovich had hoped to address: Furthering economic development to broaden the tax base and lower tax bills for property owners.

Creating plans for an ambitious development near the confluence of the Missouri and the Kansas Rivers.

Bringing more commercial and residential development to the urban core.

WHAT'S AHEAD

Marinovich insists she doesn't know what she will do next. Her immediate plans are to take a brief vacation and to spend more time in her garden and with her husband, Wyandotte County District Judge Ernie Johnson.

Is another run for higher office looming? "Not at this point," she says. "I don't enjoy the politics. Never have. I don't think I ever will."

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1989: Becomes first woman elected to the Kansas City, Kan., City Council.

1995: Becomes the city's first woman elected mayor, defeating incumbent Joe Steineger.

1997: Wins voter support for consolidation of the city and Wyandotte County governments; elected first mayor and CEO of the county's Unified Government, defeating state legislator David Haley.

2001: Wins second term as mayor and CEO, defeating former City Councilman Elmer Sharp; plans are announced to use tax incentives to bring Cabela's, Nebraska Furniture Mart and Great Wolf Lodge to the city.

2002: Named one of the nation's top 11 public officials by *Governing* magazine.

2004: Announces she won't seek re-election, becoming the first mayor in decades to leave voluntarily.

April 20, 2005: Hands over office to Mayor-elect Joe Reardon.

RECOGNITION OF LIEUTENANT DAVID WALLACE

HON. JOHN SHIMKUS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 4, 2005

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an extraordinary public servant. Lieutenant David Wallace has served the people of Litchfield, Illinois, for over 20 years as a firefighter and a training officer for first responders. Like all firefighters, he has dedicated his career to protecting the people of his community.

But on June 7 of last year, Lieutenant Wallace went above and beyond the call of duty, even for his noble profession. Just after midnight, a 9-1-1 dispatcher reported people trapped in a fire in a mobile home just two blocks from Lieutenant Wallace's own home. Though off duty, he rushed out the door and was the first rescuer on the scene. Upon arrival, he noted the heavy black smoke billowing out of the building's back porch. Knowing that there was an individual trapped in the home, but also aware that his own safety equipment was aboard a fire truck that was yet to arrive, Lieutenant Wallace made a split-second, life-or-death decision to enter the burning building and attempt a rescue.

Once inside, Lieutenant Wallace found a man on the floor, unconscious with a weak pulse. Relying on his firefighter training and his instincts, Lieutenant Wallace crawled the ten feet between the door and the victim, and began to drag the man out of the burning building. Just as he reached the door, the first pumper truck reached the scene, and a fire captain and an EMT arrived to assist in the rescue. The victim was rushed to St. Francis Hospital in Litchfield and is alive today thanks to the brave efforts of Lieutenant David Wallace.

At this year's annual ceremony in Springfield, Illinois, Lieutenant David Wallace will be awarded the Firefighting Medal of Honor for his actions that night. I want to congratulate Lieutenant Wallace, his wife Mary and his son Michael on this award, and thank David Wallace for his commitment to protecting the lives of the people of Litchfield, Illinois.